

CIVIL SOCIETY: Promoting Effective Participation

Democracy and development are sustainable only when people can take part in decisions that affect their lives and well-being. By regularly electing representatives and participating in non-governmental organizations, citizens shape the direction of government policies and programs.

At the 2001 Quebec City Summit and the 2004 Special Summit, leaders recognized that effective participation requires a partnership between governments and civil society organizations aimed at making sure the voices of different stakeholders are heard. Leaders committed to develop strategies and programs that increase opportunities for civil society—including business and labor organizations—to participate at both national and hemispheric levels.



Citizens in Rovira, Tolima, Colombia, electing community delegates to negotiate with city officials about the final selection of projects funded jointly by the municipal budget and by the CAC project, February 2003. This is an example of participatory budgeting, an activity of the Partners of the Americas USAID-funded Colombianos Apoyando a Colombianos (CAC) project. (Courtesy Partners of the Americas)

The United States strongly supports efforts to increase dialogue between governments and civil society at all levels. The U.S. has led the effort to institutionalize and broaden civil society participation in the Summit process, the Organization of American States, and other governmental mechanisms for increasing cooperation in the hemisphere. The U.S. also provides funding for civil society groups from throughout the hemisphere to participate in regional meetings, holds regular consultations with U.S. civil society groups on Summit mandates, and assists hemispheric partners in facilitating civil society dialogue at the national and local levels.

U.S. ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE HEMISPHERE'S AGENDA

- The U.S. National Summit Coordinator launched the **“Summit of the Americas in Focus” forum** in January 2004 to discuss implementation of Summit mandates. Run in cooperation with civil society organizations working on Western Hemisphere issues, the bi-monthly forum offers an opportunity for key officials to discuss U.S. Government policies and efforts on Summit implementation, and to promote greater cooperation on Summit themes.
- The U.S. funds the **Inter-American Democracy Network (IADN)**, involving 229 civil society organizations in 24 countries, to support civil society participation in the Summit process and to provide training on how to increase citizen participation in decision-making.
- The U.S. consults civil society on trade negotiations, including those for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The U.S. participates in the **FTAA Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society**, which coordinates input from civil society organizations into the process and arranges hearings on the negotiations.